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## The Art of Applied Sociology Constructing an Applied Paradigm

William Du Bois

*Applied Sociology requires a different paradigm than traditional scientific sociology. A framework for doing applied sociology can be formulated from a synthesis of available sociological traditions. Science is simply an agreement of people who have studied a given body of knowledge. The question becomes: where do we stake our agreement? Synergy provides the ideal core agreement for an applied sociology. Synergy is an operational definition of the Good and should become our evaluative mechanism. It is a win-win situation, between individuals, and between the person and the community. We need to re-discover the vision of sociology as social action designed to make a better society. We must function as artists inventing effective social forms and social arrangements where people flourish.*

Applied sociology requires an entirely different paradigm than traditional scientific sociology. It focuses on action and social change. Applied sociology asks different kinds of questions. It is a different kind of conversation. As Kenneth Boulding (1977) noted, the question for the social sciences is simply: "What is better, and how do we get there?"

What type of framework would be useful for applied sociologists? What concepts would help create viable social change and effective social action? What sort of framework and resources would be helpful for someone *doing* sociology?

Applied sociology requires a different theoretical framework than either grand theory or abstract empiricism. Merton's notion of

Great Plains Sociologist, Vol. 9, 1996, Issue 1, p. 3

middle range theories which, compromised between the two by limiting their scope isn't very helpful. It retains the biases of both: the complete elaboration of grand theory and the detailed analysis of abstracted empiricism. What we need are not middle range theories, but middle range *goals* for theory.

We must examine the purpose of theory for an applied sociology. Scientific analysis aspires to complete dissection and total explanation. Applied sociology is interested in viable action and solutions to social problems. The scientific method which seeks full elaboration is not appropriate. Rather than seeking full dissection and total explanation, we need a framework which will organize our understandings and provide direction for action.

Theory should be a participatory resource. We should know in advance that life cannot be reduced to the blackboard. Theories in sociology should not be total elaboration, but need be resources we can use to guide our action. McLuhan's idea of cool and hot mediums is relevant here.

A hot medium is one that extends... in 'high definition.' High definition is the sense of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, 'high definition.' A cartoon is 'low definition,' simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much must be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience...  
(McLuhan, 1964: pp. 22-23)

A cool medium is vague and sketchy, with details needing to be filled in; a hot medium is sharply defined with all details clearly distinguished. Theories should be cool mediums rather than hot ones. Science is a hot medium. It seeks full explanation filling in every detail in grid-like fashion. Science dissects everything leaving no room for involvement. The fully defined findings of science are then imprinted upon the world. The hot mediums of the logical positivists sought full dissection and full explanation. A theory of

action and a theory of applied sociology needs to be a cool medium. A cool medium is purposely vague: it frames the area, suggests a few significant landmarks, and invites that the details be filled in in participatory fashion.

To be useful, a map need only organize our understandings, help us find our way when we are lost, and provide direction for our action. As Edmund Carpenter (1970) notes: "Columbus' maps were vague and sketchy, but they showed the right continent." So much of our grand theory and abstract empiricism provide maps of the wrong territory. If we opt for the wrong kind of conversation, we may never get to the new world.

### **The Change the World Conversation The Origins of Sociology**

Sociology, you will remember, originated in the "change the world" conversation of August Comte and Karl Marx. It began at a time when a long line of philosophers suggested we must move out of the arm-chair of philosophy and into the world of action. As Marx summarized: "The philosophers have described the world, it is now up to us to transform it."

Marx's focus was upon radical social change. While Comte's model was conservative, his idea also was clearly to postulate an ideal society. This social change focus continued with Ward, Giddings, Park, Burgess, and Wirth. The early sociologists would have thought that to talk of an "applied sociology" was redundant. The very focus of the discipline was the concern with social action. They sought social amelioration --- to make society better.

As Ernest Becker noted, sociology is by its very nature an "ideal-type science."

August Comte, who coined the word 'sociology,'.... was to be the towering theorist of the 'emerging' society... His life's work is normally considered to fall into two distinct phases: the first work was a treatise on all sciences, putting forth the striking proposal that sociology followed logically in the history of the development of the sciences... The second work enunciated the 'Religion of Humanity' based on love: in the new community, sociology would subserve the social order and be used to

Great Plains Sociologist, Vol. 9 [1996], Iss. 1, Art. 3

promote social interest instead of the private interest that was rampant.... Admirers of Comte based their admiration on the first work, and considered that the second work was done in the grip of dementia or senility. Often, they explicitly indict Comte's love affair with Clotilde de Vaux. We shall return to the reasoned and necessary unity of Comte's system; suffice it to say for now that, contrary to the opinion of many superficial commentators, Comte was well aware of what he was doing -- the two 'phases' of his work were an integrated whole. The first period was a systematization that he undertook on a positivistic, scientific basis to avoid the charges of mysticism which he knew might be leveled against his guiding ideas. The second period was a frank predication of his life work on feeling, love, and morality, which he felt were the basis for his whole position. (Becker: 1968, 43-44)

"The science of man is, historically and by its very nature, a utopian science." (Becker: 1971, p. x) [*Non-Inclusive Language in Original*]

"We needed a science which would help us 'live the dream' better than it was lived in the Middle Ages, or in 'primitive' society -- a science that would seek to develop the conditions of life enhancement." (Becker: 1968, p. 381)

Gradually, however, sociology drifted towards the legitimacy and safety of scientific status. As with classical philosophy, the question of "how do we make the good?" was replaced with the question of "how do we find the truth?" A direct moral intervention into society seemed too audacious. Sociologists wrestled with causal analysis, theoretical abstraction, and surveys. Grant proposals replaced social action. Research findings became of paramount importance, and sociology climbed back into the armchairs of social philosophy and data analysis. Action was postponed.

Every generation has had critics of this approach: questioning what we are doing, and asking that we return to the original "change the world" focus of the discipline. Robert Lynd, after having done the classic research on social class, after having

collected voluminous amounts of data, returned to ask the question: "What are we doing?"

C. Wright Mills (1959) challenged a generation to move past the Power Elite and envision social solutions to everyday problems. The Sociological Imagination means integrating personal problems and social issues in a way that will provide creative social inventions to address problems experienced by individuals. The sociological imagination is not just a diversion for arm-chair analysis and understanding. The purpose of the sociological imagination is to see the common threads so we can create common resources which help our individual problems.

Berger and Luckman had it wrong. The Invitation to Sociology is not for the creature caught in the trap to look up with some measure of understanding of their plight. The Invitation that actually gets people involved in Sociology is the Invitation to Change the World. It is not just about analysis or description or even understanding. Sociology is about transforming the world.

Young people enter the discipline eager to make the world better. Older people retire once again pointing to the vision and promise of sociology. In between takes place the mid-life business of sociology. We need to return the change the world conversation to front and center stage.

The argument has been made that the immature social sciences will someday reach the stature of the mature physical sciences. We have been taught to model sociology after physics and chemistry. We have constructed a positivism which presumes to someday tell us how to live. We climb on a scientific Tower of Babel to discover God's Rulebook -- the true laws of the universe. But it is such an effort which is immature. Most of what we know about human behavior looks more like fundamental principles and wisdom rather than laws. And the attempt to find fool-proof prescriptions for living looks more like folly than wisdom. A value-free science appears to be not only impossible, but dangerous.

Wanting to separate themselves from mere speculative social philosophy, the early sociologists had joined the scientific bandwagon that was proving so successful for the physical sciences. Insecure about the identity of their discipline, they sought the canopy of scientific status. But by the middle of the twentieth century, even the foundations of physical science were being re-examined. Polanyi (1958) showed scientific knowledge was

ultimately personal knowledge, and Kuhn (1964) demonstrated that the scientific establishment functioned like any other inbred group: automatically excluding certain world-views and operational styles from club membership. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he showed scientific laws are legislated just like any other laws -- they are social agreements between the experts.

Butterfield (1957) argued in *The Origins of Modern Science*, that intuition played a far greater role in scientific discoveries than we have recognized. Cassirer (1944) argued science dealt not just with facts, but the *art* of organizing information into a *story*. Heisenberg (1977) followed Einstein and found we are never going to be able to determine one final truth by a scientific process. It was questioned whether the "immature" social sciences would ever ripen into "mature" sciences.

Many sociologists also began to question whether sociology really should model itself after physical science (Mills, 1959; Horowitz, 1964; Phillips, 1971; Lee, 1973). Are value-free methods really suitable for a study of humanity? Discontent with a scientific model that stressed objectivity, controlled experiments, and an absence of values (Mills, 1959; Mateson, 1964; Maslow, 1966; Hampton-Turner, 1970; Phillips, 1971), they sought a more involved approach that followed the work of Mannheim (1947), Cooley (1929), Mead (1938), and Cassirer (1944). Kenneth Burke (1945) argued science does not find the "truth": it only provides a metaphor for organizing our information. Scientists do not passively *discover* a world; they selectively shape images to a particular world-view and *shape* the world in that image.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills argued we have confused rationality with thinking. Rationality is a method of thinking based on the scientific method. Yet the ability to think is not dependent on a pre-determined method. Reason often demands we form our judgments from our experience. We must not allow a method of thought to dictate our thinking. In our age, we have mistaken rationality for reason, when in fact they are often the opposite. To forgo allegiance to the scientific method does not mean we have abandoned thinking and reason. It may mean we that we have graduated to more mature thought.

Do we want a value-less sociology? Do we really not care how our findings are put to use? This is the question Alvin

He asks if sociologists really want to be the hand-maidens of government. Do we trust that value-free findings will somehow be used for good? Unfortunately, for most, Gouldner's crisis came, went, and passed without a whimper. Most sociologists whored after grant money. They remained unconcerned that the values had already been programmed into most research. They were content to sit musing over interesting insights. For many politicians, sociological research became a delaying tactic: money could be spent on more research with action postponed forever. And the question of "whom sociology serves?" which was so prominent in the 1960's became muted in a modern world of government demographics, market research, political pollsters, and jury consultants. Values were simply sold to the highest bidder.

B. F. Skinner wrote a fictional novel about an ideal society called *Walden Two*. Ironically, the coldly clinical Skinner impassioned people and launched a generation of social scientists who believed in creating the great society. Skinner's approach was to be based on science. As science fiction writers warned, it took us towards a sinister Brave New World. But he imagined a new society. Skinner's key argument, which he makes in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, must be addressed. Science and technology have truly assembled us with awesome power. We are left with value decisions that previously were reserved for the gods. Abstaining from choices only abdicates the choice to someone else. We are clearly left with value decisions: what do we want to make? When it comes to human nature and the social world, the question is not: what is? The question is: what would you like?

We must function as artists making a world. Perhaps sociology should be in a different theater than traditional science. Sociology grew up with the dream of being a *pragmatic* discipline. Moving beyond mere moral philosophy, it was to study behavior and consequences. Ironically, it is a psychologist, Erich Fromm, who succinctly summarized the sociological insight: we can do almost anything to people, but we can't do it without consequences (Fromm: 1968, pp. 63-64). If one buys the sociological understanding, each environment increases the likelihood of certain consequences. We can change those consequences by planting resources into the environment.



We should discard a deterministic scientific model that seeks prediction and control. The sociological model is probabilistic.

When it comes to social policy, there is no need for a strict causal model of sociology. By way of example: Life insurance companies have done perfectly fine with an actuarial model. Good health is associated with exercise, good diet, stopping smoking, and no excessive drinking. It does not matter that a strict cause and effect chain has not been totally established. Correlational data suits us just fine. Everyone knows that such a prevention program has worked, and indeed, life insurance companies have staked their financial security on this data. Similarly, as a crime prevention strategy, correlational data would suit us. By introducing resources to promote meaning, opportunities, empowerment, and community, we could significantly lower crime. In fact, a multi-faceted approach works better than a refined scientific model.

The fact that a correlation might be only  $+0.20$  (accounting for only 4% of variation) does not mean that including it in our prevention design will not reduce crime. Life insurance companies would love information on a variable of even this small magnitude. Paying attention to it would lower liability. Crime, like most social problems, does not arise because of only one factor, and a one factor approach is not the solution. Incorporating everything we know into our prevention design makes for success. A strict researcher will say that this contaminates our research design and makes it impossible to isolate variables for causal analysis. The action sociologist will reply simply: Who cares? Our goal is not causal dissection. It is inventing programs that work. Our evaluation will be our success. Prevention it would be evidenced by lower crime rates.

This is the logical progression of the Sociological Imagination. The environment is the context in which our individual dramas take place. What sorts of social resources might individuals find helpful in their individual struggles? By investing in these resources, we will have gone a long way to the prevention of later social problems.

By seeding resources in the environment, we can increase the likelihood of certain behaviors. The sociologist should function as an artist inventing new resources and social forms.

The best sociology has always been *art*..... or perhaps *social architecture*. It has been designing programs, imagining a new society, and inventing new social forms. Ernest Becker is right when he contends that Sociology is and always has been an "ideal type" science. It is in the realm of imaging a *better* world.

Sociology should be about *inventing*. It should be about inventing social forms, social programs, social constructions, and participatory resources. The sociologist as artist creates resources which are offered up to the culture.

### **A Positive Critical Theory**

Critical theory is right in asserting that the idea of a positivist science which will tell us how to live is obsolete and must be discarded. However, it is an arm-chair luxury to merely condemn without beginning the hard work of deciding what to recommend.

Having declared scientific sociology to be junk, we must not stop there. Critical Theory has always been a "negative" theory which analyzes what is wrong with a perspective while examining motives and potential abuses. A "Positive Critical Theory" can be constructed by sorting through theories for insights worth keeping. As Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter notes, it is in the junkyard that artists can see true forms. Freed from their original purpose, the junk of science and grand theory can be recycled. We must sort for meaningful theoretical insights and significant research findings. Amidst the junk, sociology has many treasures worth recovering.

### **Sociology as Art -- Social Forms & Media:**

#### **Georg Simmel, Marshall McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter**

We need to recover the important sociological tradition of Formalism. Simmel, unlike other early sociologists did not opt for final truths. He steered clear of the problem and instead recommended sociology study "social forms" as the elementary roots of social life. He spent his career then outlining the dynamics of particular forms including secrets, group size, the city, the stranger..... Despite some differences, there is a similarity between Simmel's idea of social forms and Marshall McLuhan's idea of media. Media are "extensions of person." They include language,

laws, rules & policies, organizations, culture, and indeed all social constructions. Great Plains Sociologist, Vol. 9 [1996], Iss. 1, Art. 3

Media and social forms are the paints or the tools with which we construct society and our lives. It is instructive that both Simmel and McLuhan felt it important that we study the dynamics of forms/media. Rather than being lost in a debate over final scientific truths, they sought a rendition where the artist would learn the peculiarities and nuances of each tool / form / medium. Such an approach is the foundation for being able to envision a version of sociology as Art.

Artists must understand the nature of their tools and materials. When does one work? What are the advantages and limitations of each? How can you mix colors? What is the nature of oils vs. watercolors? When do you use different types of brush strokes? Which materials best lend themselves to what forms of expression? With an understanding of our paints / forms / media, we as artists can begin to create. The discipline of Sociology would be a study of forms with an eye towards using that knowledge to artistically create the world. Forms/media become the resources with which we create the world and stage its meaning.

The idea that sociology is an art is not new to sociological literature. Probably the traditional statement of such a conception is Nesbit's (1962) article "Sociology as an Art form." However, what Nesbit is really talking about is not so much sociology as art, but the role of the intuitive in hypothesis formation. Otherwise, his is a traditional scientific process.

We will have to return all the way to Comte (1842) to gain a view of Art framing Science instead of the other way around. It is only recently that a contemporary option has emerged. For a full-blown version of sociology as art, we must turn to the work of an anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter (1970).<sup>1</sup> Carpenter did not state his thesis in tight structural forms. Instead, he strung lines through time and space much as an artist might do, but within his work can

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter's classic work is *They Became What They Beheld*. He artistically scatters images in time and space in a non-linear fashion to convey his perspective. For those who would like a more lineal view, his *Oh, What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me* covers much of the same territory. Marshall McLuhan originally co-authored an earlier version of *They Became What They Beheld*. It is apparent that McLuhan's version was later published as *The Mechanical Bride*.

be found the beginnings of a humanistic sociology. Originally trained as an anthropologist in such diverse settings as the South Pacific, South America, and Alaska of the American Eskimo, Carpenter emerged on the contemporary scene to lend a fresh eye to our changing patterns in American culture during the counterculture era. He later worked for UNESCO and the Australian government as a consultant of how to bring media to primitive South Pacific cultures without destroying them. The vision he wove is a golden bough for the sociologist wishing to conceive of sociology as an art.

Technology, Carpenter claimed, has circumscribed both culture and science rendering their original purposes obsolete. From this junkyard of resources, every person is forced to create their own world. All cultures have bended to the technological imperative. However, we have not been left with just the directionlessness of anomie, but an opportunity to create our own lives and environments. The destruction of cultural systems of meaning demands that we all function as artists.

Carpenter's monumental work moves past a critique of science into an exploration of doing the art; of framing a conversation which moves past technological society and develops countercultural forms. Carpenter's (1970) book, *They Became What They Beheld*, may well be a summary of the crucial sociological insight: We become what we behold. We shape our environments and, thereafter, they shape us. If we wish to shape the world as artists, then we must become literate with our media, for these are our resources.

Carpenter was originally the senior author with Marshall McLuhan of *Explorations in Communications*. Media<sup>2</sup> --- the term McLuhan (1960) popularized --- refers not just to mass media, but to all social constructions of humans. Media are "extensions of person" -- the attempt to enlarge upon the world of the senses. Media include television, radio, and newspapers, but they also include all other social inventions: language, rules/laws, and organizations. Indeed, almost all elements of culture are media in the McLuhan sense.

McLuhan classic statement was "The Medium is the Message." Each media or form has its own message and shapes content. As Carpenter explains:

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<sup>2</sup> *Inclusive Language Mine*: originally "extensions of man"

All languages are mass media. The new mass media -- film, radio, TV -- are new languages, their grammars as yet unknown. Each codifies reality differently: each conceals a unique metaphysics. Linguists tell us it's possible to say anything in any language if you use enough words or images, but there's rarely time; the natural course is for a culture to exploit its media biases.... (cited in Culkin: 1968, p. 245)

Although it's possible to say anything in any media, that seldom happens, media tend to exploit their biases. Similarly, we must understand the dynamics of each social form. For example, written rules as a medium can do some things and not others. What are the limits of rules? What do they do well? What kinds of things cannot be legislated by rules and policies? The average legislator or manager desperately needs a class in the art of rules and policies. What can be done by laws? What can't be done by laws?

We need to understand the social forms, the media -- the dynamics and nature of each. We can utilize them to function as artists to create a social world.

The similarity between the idea of "media" and Simmel's (1950) conception of "social forms" must be recognized. Carpenter's work is a continuation of formalism which places it directly in the sociological tradition. Media are social forms. For Simmel, sociology was the study of social forms. For Carpenter, it is the understanding of the grammar and application of media. It is in this consciousness that we must construct our lives. As cultural traditions become de-classified and secularized, they become available to the artist as resources for constructing a new mythos. This is the task that both Becker (1971) and psychologist Carl Jung (1964) saw as the new work of the behavioral disciplines. Such is the work of the sociologist as artist.

We must ask what kinds of conceptions are the most useful for the sociologist as artist. An artistic theory does not need to fulfill the criteria of science because it is designed for a different purpose. An artistic conception may require a different type of conversation than the clear and full statement of science. As Carpenter (1970, n.p.) noted: "Clear speaking is generally obsolete thinking . . . The problem with full statement is that it does not involve: it is addressed to the consumer, not the co-producer."

Du Bois: The Art of Applied Sociology: Constructing an Applied Paradigm

Simmel's formalism was so radical because it retreated from an epistemological base. No longer seeking the source of life, it dealt with the resources that we use in shaping life. Such a strategy is by no means unheard of in sociology. It is similar to the tack taken by Parsons (1951) in formulating an ideal functionalism. It represents a utopian split with philosophy into the business of shaping the world.

### An Active Dramaturgy

The most important sociologist of our time has gone unnoticed or forgotten. Ernest Becker taught sociology at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960's. His work won the Pulitzer Prize in the 1970's. And yet most sociologists aren't familiar with either his name or his work.

For sociology, his most important work is *The Structure of Evil*. It could have just as easily been called "Making the Good" since it is the story of Sociology's quest to change the world. However, at the time Becker wrote, a title such as "The Structure of Evil" was academically legitimate and respectable whereas "Making the Good" would not have been.

As artists sociologists are called upon to create a better world. Ernest Becker writes it is a question of aesthetics: good art or bad art. Good art brings us to meaning. Bad art leaves us impoverished: feeling controlled; impotent; and empty. Evil is seen as a complex response to the coercion of human powers and a restriction of human meanings. Translated into simple language, this means evil stems from powerlessness and a lack of meaning. A sterile environment empty of resources and devoid of opportunities for participation leads to a shallowness which restricts living.

"When science opted out of life and objectivized man, scientists of course lost the possibility of seeing any mystery at all in man, of seeing any heightening being, even in secular terms" (p. 267).

. . . mostly people approach each other from the point of view of their roles, rather than as whole beings . . . . They have, in effect, subverted the possibilities of their total being to the narrow interest of action and

uncritical survival. The question posed by any  
Great Plains Sociologist, Vol. 9 [1996], Iss. 1, Art. 3  
cultural game is the question about higher and lower  
esthetics -- about 'good' art and 'bad' art . . . whereas  
true esthetics should liberate man, develop his freedom,  
and further his whole self, 'everyday' esthetics --  
sacrifices most of the total man to a mere part, to the  
part that must convey the sliver of conviction necessary  
to sustain the ongoing cultural game . . .

. . . But 'higher' esthetics is precisely that; it calls more  
of man's spirit into play, releases more of the inner  
personality and brings it to bear upon the world.

. . . The problem, inescapably, is a social one. We have  
destroyed the interhuman in our time simply because  
we have refused to implement social forms which  
would liberate man . . . (Becker: 1968, p. 273). [*Non-  
Inclusive Language in Original*]

We need to create participatory resources which empower  
people. We need to create resources which people can use in their  
own daily dramas to create a more meaningful lives. The  
sociologist as artist becomes an inventor of social forms.

In Becker's understanding, heroism is the heart of meaning.  
An effective environment provides opportunities for people to be a  
hero -- to be a star. A culture without opportunities to be a star  
lacks meaning. Interestingly, Tom Peters and Bob Waterman  
(1983) in their *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's  
Best Run Companies* used Ernest Becker's sociology / psychology  
as their framework. They found that an excellent organization  
created opportunities for heroism, found ways to honor its heroes,  
and highlighted a vision so people felt part of a meaningful activity.

Fully using Becker's work would imply creating an action-  
oriented dramaturgy involved in providing resources to better live  
the dream. For example, creating meaningful opportunities to be a  
star is just as relevant to innercity gang problems as it is to ending  
alienation in the workplace. What kinds of props, resources, and  
programs would actors in certain situations find valuable? As  
artists we must be involved in inventing resources to better shape  
the world. Becker's perspective on life as theater would imply  
inventing participatory resources individual actors could then utilize

in their own personal dramas. The sociologist as an artist would seek to invent "good art" and creative social forms, programs, and resources which individuals could utilize to construct better lives.

## **An Extension Model of Sociology -- Action Sociology**

Ernest Becker notes in *The Structure of Evil* :

The founding of a science is never a cognitive problem alone: it is always inseparably a moral problem , a problem of gaining broad agreement to act on the basis of a theory....

In the human sciences the problem of gaining wide loyalty to a paradigm is no different than in any other science.... Only, a subtle new factor magnifies the problem immensely, and gives it entirely new proportions: *in the human sciences it is sharpened to an extreme degree, because the agreement cannot be disguised as an objective scientific problem.....*in the natural and physical sciences, paradigm agreement looks like a matter of option for an objectively compelling theory.... In the human sciences, *the same kind of option for a compelling theory looks unashamedly like a wholly moral option*, because of the frankly moral nature of its subject matter....

Paradigm choice, in sum, in the human sciences, differs in no way from that of the other sciences except that the willful, moral nature of the option cannot be disguised... (Becker: 1968:362) [*Italics Original*]

Sociology (just like any other science) is about values and making the world in a certain image. However, when we move from the physical world into the social sphere, new problems emerge. This is no where more apparent than when we recommend that Applied Sociology should embrace a true extension model of education.

Becker continues:



To opt for a theory of human ills is not only to opt for the kind of person one is going to have to pay deference to professionally; it is also to opt potentially for the kind of world *one is going to wake up in*, the kind of human beings that one will have to *come across on the street*. To opt for a particular theory of human ills is very much like falling in love in the strictest sense: it is to opt for the presence of a certain kind of being in the world, and hence for a certain kind of world. (Becker: 1968: 364)

However, when it comes to the social dimension, Cooperative Extension Services have generally chosen *to react* and *to follow*. They have waited for requests from constituencies to address whatever locals considered the problem to be. They have chosen to safely trail with an analysis of symptoms rather than to lead and treat the real underlying problems. This has been politically safe, but we cannot afford such a luxury.

We must remember, the word "education" from the original Latin means literally "to lead forth." If Extension programs react and follow the popular fad, then we have abdicated our responsibility and can hardly pretend that we are involved in "education." Again the question becomes one of values. To lead forth: where and how? What values do we recommend?

Whitehead noted the function of education is to "promote the art of living."<sup>3</sup> Aristotle recommended a "science of the polis" which would use knowledge to improve the community. A science of society is by its very nature political.

The problem is when it comes to social problems, everybody thinks they're an expert. In addition, many special interests groups purposely pollute our understandings to promote their own selfish agendas. Yet when we review sociological knowledge, some understandings and agreements do emerge.

A consensus of sociologists would conclude that a variety of social problems arise from the consequences of alienation and the antidote is meaning, opportunity, and community. The general public may clamor for more prisons and less programs for the poor, but any thoughtful review of sociological research will reveal the

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<sup>3</sup> quoted in Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, 1968, p. 61

futility of such a strategy. By focusing on the nature of the social bond that we call society, some natural conclusions emerge.

Erich Fromm notes that we can arrive at a objective science if we start with one basic premise: social arrangements should function for the human.

...one may arrive at objective norms if one starts with one premiss: that it is desirable that a living system should grow and produce the maximum of vitality and intrinsic harmony, that is, subjectively, of well-being. (Fromm, 1968: p. 96)

The value system corresponding to the point of view presented in this book is based on the concept of what Albert Schweitzer called "reverence for life." Valuable or good is all that which contributes to the greater unfolding of man's specific faculties and furthers life. Negative or bad is everything that strangles life and paralyzes man's activeness. All the norms of the great humanist religions like Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam or the great humanist philosophers from pre-Socratics to contemporary thinkers are the specific elaboration of this general principle of values. Overcoming of one's greed, love for neighbor, knowledge of the truth (different from the uncritical knowledge of the facts) are the goals common to all humanist philosophical and religious systems of the West and the East. (*Non-Inclusive in Language Original*) (Fromm, 1968: pp. 93-94)

Many have felt Fromm was a "light-weight." This is because his argument covers such a broad range that it is necessary to take large strokes. But it is necessary to be just this bold, if we are going to approach a synthesis.

## A Science of Human Behavior

A different conception of science must emerge. Our means must mirror our purposes. A scientific method based on total prediction and total control is not suitable.....

Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* demonstrated that science is simply an agreement between those who have studied a body of knowledge. Scientific laws are thus legislated like any other laws. They are agreements. They are an agreement to towards the world in a certain way. The question for the social sciences becomes: where do we want to stake our agreement?

It was the logical positivists of the late 19th century who felt that they would discover the truth and that would then tell them how to act..... The last century's epistemology of science has revealed that values cannot be separated from science..... Science will not be free from the responsibility of deciding. We are back with a question of values: where to begin? what to start? and what type of world do we want be make?

In the social sciences, as Becker notes, we will never be able to totally explain a phenomenon before we act. Our subject is human life. We will never have all the answers. How much information must be in before we act? We need some orienting framework within which to act. How do we move? How do we organize our understandings? How much of a puzzle must be solved before we can create viable solutions? A true Science of human behavior is quite different than physical science. Where do we stake our agreements?

Becker writes:

....laws of human nature can never be complete... The problem for morality is always this: how much of the picture is necessary to commend agreed action?.... Sociologists should no longer imagine that it suffices 'to do' science; that in order to have a science of man, they need only work piling up data, and trying to 'tease out' social laws for eventual use. They may turn their backs on a paradigm..... but they cannot shun an active option for man an end. If they continue to do so, they will not have any science. The reason is simply that the science of man is an ideal-typical science, or -- there is no science of man. (Becker: 1968: 361) [*Non-*

## Designing the Good Society

Can we just depart from a philosophical base and imagine an ideal society? Such an adventure is not without precedence in sociology. Talcott Parsons imagined an orderly social system which focused on the needs of society rather than the person. His vision became reified into an ideal and became a model for organizations and government. We should not find fault with Parsons for positing an ideal and then turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy which is then treated as reality. He seems to realize that sociology is in the business of doing just that. He leaves the real for the ideal. Ernest Becker notes in *The Structure of Evil*, that sociology is of its very nature "an ideal type" science. We are fully in the adventure of asking: what type of world do we want to make?

It is not Parsons' method but his vision with which we need to find fault. We need to reject Parsons' ideal: a social system where the individual is subjugated by the society. For Parsons, the social system is more important than the person. His is just another rendition of the old idea that communal good is greater than the individual good. However, It is the boldness of Parsons' step to envisioning society *as it should be* that deserves our appreciation. In doing so, he was returning us to the business of sociology as envisioned by Comte, Marx, Spencer, Weber, and Ward. It is the business of making the world.

Parson's perspective is wrong and it is bad art. However, we must note the consequences and "success" of his perspective. It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy where his ideal has become the model for organizations, government, and society. His model is often confused as a rendition of "what is" when in actuality it was his imagining of what "should be" in an ideal society/organization. Unfortunately his ideal has become implemented and real. The social system is clearly designed for the system's needs not the needs of the individuals in it.

Despite the folly and evilness of his success, Parsons has demonstrated that sociological theory has great impact. The policy makers, government leaders, and heads of corporations are indeed listening to us. It is unfortunate that Parsons created such bad art.

However, we need to note the clear precedence and demonstration of the successfulness of sociologists imagining and creating an ideal. [Of course, such is very dangerous if we opt for bad art or authoritarian means which destroy people as ends. The example of Nazi Germany clearly can be laid in the lap of sociology if we pay careful attention to the Social Darwinists and sociologists that Hitler listened to.]

However, there is no alternative to entering the world. The question is: how? Modern scientific sociology thrives. Witness consumer market research, public opinion manipulation, jury consultants, and the manufacturing of the common denominator television programs. This is hardly the legacy we should leave behind.

The knowledge we produce *will be used*. The question is what types of means and resources will help to build a better world.

We are left with an age old question: What is the Good?

### **An Operational Definition of “the Good”**

It is the genius of Ruth Benedict that she provides us with an operational definition of the Good. The Good is synergy. Synergy provides the ideal core agreement for the foundation of sociology. Synergy is an effective social arrangement where people flourish. It is a win-win situation, both between individuals, and also between the person and the community.

Under some social conditions, people flourish, while under others, although the spirit is willing, people atrophy. Synergistic social arrangements provide the context for healthy life.

... a society or a culture can be either growth-fostering or growth-inhibiting... . This makes theoretically possible a comparative sociology, transcending and including cultural relativity. The 'better' culture gratifies all basic human needs and permits self-actualization. The 'poorer' cultures do not (Maslow, 1964: p. 211).

What makes an effective social arrangement where people thrive? Synergy may be viewed in at least five important ways:

- Du Bois: The Art of Applied Sociology Constructing an Applied Paradigm
- 1) **The Communal Good = The Individual Good**
  - 2) Alignment of Organizational Goals and Individual Interests
  - 3) a "Win - Win" situation
  - 4)  $1 + 1 > 2$ .
  - 5) A Higher order synthesis

**The Communal Good = The Individual Good.** An age old philosophical argument concerns what should happen if there is a conflict between the community and the individual. Traditionally philosophy solved this by deciding if a conflict should occur between the individual good and the communal good, the communal good should have eminent domain.

the communal good > the individual good

In another cluster of cultures, individuals defined as life as bad -- the world was deemed an evil place. Their religions held the world was an evil place ruled by jealous, vengeful gods. And social indices in these cultures seemed to bear out the actors testimony: crime rates were high; aggression was high; suicide rates, divorce rates, alcoholism were all high

Benedict found in non-effective cultures this arrangement had been followed. In this arrangement, the individual is left with a choice between personal or communal interests. This societal tension between the individual and society usually results in the individual taking turns between community interest and self interest. Complete sacrifice of self for community is impossible. The self can only be kept down for so long. People have human needs that must be met. Indeed, Sigmund Freud and the work of all psychology to follow, is but an extended footnote to the fact that if we deny self in one form, it re-surfaces in another. The tension between self and society resurfaces as high aggression, alcoholism, depression, suicide, marital discord, and all varieties of anomie. Individuals do not view themselves as happy and see the world as a bad place ruled by evil forces. By both objective and subjective evaluations, individuals do not seem to thrive under these social arrangements.

Benedict found in effective social arrangements, society had been arranged so the communal good and the individual good were

identical. The same act accomplished both the individual good and the communal good.

Great Plains Sociologist, Vol. 9 [1996], Iss. 1, Art. 3

the communal good = the individual good

Effective social arrangements create an environment where people can get their needs met. As Benedict writes, "Non-aggression occurs not because people are unselfish and pursue social obligations above personal desire, but when social arrangements makes these two identical ." (Benedict quoted in Maslow, 1971, p. 40)

In these cultures, the actors -- people involved themselves -- defined life as good. And when we look at the social indices, *from any human standpoint, life in these cultures does appear to be good.* Both the people and the social data testify to the success of these social arrangements.

**Alignment of Organizational Goals and Individual Interests.** Effective companies align organizational goals and individual interests. Rather asking individuals to sacrifice for the sake of the company, the best organizations find ways that benefits both individual and the organization.

Synergy is not a matter of chemistry but of social design. Kanter's earlier work on communities and utopias understands this. Successful social arrangements must be designed whereby organization and person both thrive. The manager must become an inventor and an architect of new social arrangements and social forms. The effective leader must become an architect of organizational culture and design so as to align the individual and the organization. Without such alignment, the organizations pays the price in employee alienation including absenteeism, turnover, employee theft, sabotage, sagging morale, declining productivity, lower quality control, and lower profits.

**Win - Win.** Effective societies structure win - win social arrangements. Ineffective societies arrange life in win - lose situations. Benedict found synergistic societies (a win-win framework) have substantially lower rates of aggression than non-synergistic societies. This only makes sense. Aggression must abound if the only way a person can get ahead is at another person's expense. Benedict wrote, "Small-scale or large, the fundamental

condition of peace is federation for mutual advantage." (Benedict Du Bois, *The Art of Applied Sociology, Constructing an Applied Paradigm* article published in *Psychology Today*, 1970, p. 55).

The win-win framework can also be tied to psychology and sociology. Psychologist Alfred Adler sees the key element in the formation of personality as the staging of self esteem. If a person has a superiority complex (the winner), it is actually a compensation mechanism to disguise an inferiority complex (the loser). Inferiority complexes are the product of a win-lose dynamic. Only win-win resolutions will allow individuals to feel good about themselves. Win-Win dynamics are essential for the successful formation of self esteem.

Sociologist Erving Goffman also speaks of the social staging of self esteem in terms that have traditionally associated with etiquette. He talks of "saving face." Goffman notes that each social interaction has a public face. The only way either person can feel good is if this face is preserved and both people come out ahead. If one person establishes victory at the another's expense, neither party comes away feeling permanently satisfied about the interaction. Goffman sees these "face saving" rituals as key to successful social life. (Becker, 1962)

$1 + 1 > 2$ . Synergy may also be defined as where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The whole is greater than the "run of individual actions."

Sociology is founded on the notion the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Society is not just the sum of the individuals in it -- such would be psychological reductionism.

We might contrast social arrangements where  $1 + 1 > 2$  with arrangements where  $1 + 1 < 2$ . Jessie Bernard (1972) talks of how a woman often *dwindles* into becoming a wife. Here we have a picture of a social relationship where the partners are *less* together than they each were alone. We can almost see each partner lopping off parts of themselves to fit themselves into relationship.

**Higher order synthesis.** Synergy literally means a "synthesizing energy." The word was actually coined by Ward to represent a *creative synthesis*. Ultimately, synergy must be a matter of balancing the long-term vs. short-term. In the short-run clearly some things are a zero sum game where someone has to lose. In the long term, however, we can invent arrangements where



the important needs of all are met. Under some social arrangements, people flourish. Under other arrangements, although the spirit is willing, people atrophy.

Synergy is the cornerstone on which we can begin the work of sociology. It provides an ideal vision which should become our evaluative standard for the Good. Synergy should be the evaluative mechanism for effective social arrangements. If *after* having *experienced* a social arrangement, people are still experiencing themselves as losers, then we must return to the drawing board.

**Defining the Situation:** In many ways, synergy is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Benedict talks about how synergistic societies never give up on an individual. Crime exists in these societies, but people believe that the person will come around, repent, and eventually outgrow the behavior. They never give up on the person. And sure enough, in these societies, the self-fulfilling prophecy tends to be true.

Benedict writes that some cultures nourish the person:

People are apt to wait patiently for his growth in wisdom and discretion. The whole course of his experience has inculcated in him a faith in the rewards of acting with his fellows. He sees life as an area of mutual advantage where by joint activity he attains his own personal desires. (Benedict article published in *Psychology Today*, 1970, p. 55). [*Non-Inclusive Language in Original*]

In other societies, the person is labeled as "no damn good" and society gives on them. Labeling theory demonstrates the consequences of both positive and negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Correctly understood, labeling theory focuses upon the *consequences* of defining a situation. It is not the label or the belief that creates the self-fulfilling prophecy. It is the willing of people to *act* on the basis of these definitions of the situation and *treat* people differently. We define a person as bad, and then act accordingly by putting the person in prison and treating them as a criminal. In synergistic societies, the definition the situation is that

people are basically good and the society then acts in ways that  
Du Bois: The Art of Applied Sociology Constructing an Applied Paradigm  
create that self-fulfilling prophecy.

## Social Architecture

Sociology should be about *inventing*. The sociologist as an artist invents new social forms. We should be creating new resources, inventing programs, and designing demonstration projects. We should be offering up participatory resources that actors can bring to the situation to create their own meaning.

Most Social Engineering is simply bad art. Life is not reducible to science. A better metaphor for sociology is that of social architecture. Social *engineering* implies that we have total control of the environment in the first place and we seek to manipulate from an all-knowing perspective. The ideal vision for the sociologist as artist is the metaphor of the social architect designing organizational cultures. Social architecture offers up resources that individual can use in their own way.

Applied sociology can serve as an incubator for new ideas and model programs. A word of caution needs to be introduced here. As with architecture, a brilliant design is not always apparent at first. An act of creative genius may be moaned about at first even though we later come to love it. A social resource can only be evaluated after it is lived in, interacted with, and we can see how it works. It is the role of the architect to be able to anticipate how a design will function. Architects can be right and they can be wrong. It is the true artist that creates a magic beyond what we see from the initial design.

The sociologist can help by inventing solutions to social and organizational problems. We need to be artists involved in inventing something brand new. Unfortunately most social policy is bad art. Most of the people inventing new social forms and social policies have minimal sociological knowledge; and most sociologists have relegated themselves to the obscurity and irrelevance of science. We need a new kind of sociology. We must return to the roots of the discipline and create new applied sociology.

Marshall McLuhan has perhaps the bottom line. He notes "the study of man is based on making not matching..."<sup>4</sup> It so often seems that we assume that just because we have labeled something, we have understood it. Sociology is too often simply "name-calling": matching labels to experiences, behaviors to categories, and re-naming the world with new concepts. Instead of merely labeling, defining, and analyzing; sociology should be about inventing and creating. We must be about creating new social forms and making a better world.

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<sup>4</sup> *Non-Inclusive Language in Original*

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